

Preamble

Narratives and Social Memory: Dialogic Challenges

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Editors

Since the “narrative turn” in social and human sciences, there has been a huge development in the research about narrative structures, functions, processes, and contents. The interplay between narratives, identity, and memory has become a fertile domain of interdisciplinary studies as well as fruitful dialogues between researchers, practitioners, and citizens. Yet, an integrative and broadest approach is still missing, and requires an intensive work of self-reflexivity and self-scrutiny of our own assumptions, methods of research and intervention, and perhaps even more challenging, the language that we use and the concepts and categories that we, explicitly or implicitly, convey.

To deal with the increasing complexities of these fields of research, and of the world around us, we need to be able to embrace several lines of thought at the same time and combine different methodologies to reach more nuanced descriptions and interpretations of these realities.

The recent explosion of the social media, the intensification and diversification of migration flows, and the increasing interconnectivity and hybridity of the world, goes along with the maintenance of old divides and gaps, which keep on shaping our lives, sometimes in subtle but very powerful ways. Making sense of the complex and changing environment around us is a demanding task that requires problematization of “old” and “new” dichotomies frequently convened in scientific models.

Social memory is at the heart of the dynamic interplay between culture, cognition, and identity. Within the last decades, there was a proliferation of scientific and political debates around memory, namely, in what concerns the “politics of memory”, “politics of identity”, and “memory rights”. In the scope of human and social sciences, there is a diverse lexicon, which offers several alternative ways of understanding memory and its links to history, media, and society: collective, communicative, cultural, popular, public, unofficial, contested, fragmented, etc. With regard to cognitive and health sciences, memory tends to be located at an individual level, privileging another set of lexicon: autobiographical, declarative, flashbulb, episodic, short-term, long-term, semantic, procedural, etc.

In our understanding, memory is “social” in the sense that it is a product and process embedded in the social milieu, which cannot be understood without taking into account the power relations, the asymmetric forces and filters operating in a given cultural context, the individual and group agency, the personal experiences and trajectories, and the “tools” and “vehicles” of memory, both in its embodied and technological forms.

Memory is neither about the objective remembering of factual events nor about the storage of a fixed past. It is a process of selection, interpretation, and permanent reconstruction, which

comprises both remembering and forgetting. Officially or unofficially, intentionally or not, the construction of collective memory is always an attempt to convey a particular point of view. Due to its potential for legitimization of present-day and future agendas, collective memories have been a privileged arena for the struggle for specific meanings as well as their contestation. Memory constitutes a vital anchor for identity processes; rather than a static and solid anchor, it is a malleable and fluid one.

Traditional conceptualizations of identity tend to be primarily related to notions such as belonging, sameness, stability, and continuity, rather than to the idea of in-progress project in a continuous and complex process of change. Recent theoretical approaches recognize how contemporary national and transnational identity narratives require hybrid multilayered configurations.

The stories we tell, and the stories we listen to, define who we are and who are the “others”. They also shape interpersonal, intergroup, and intercultural relationships. In a world undergoing accelerated mutation and shifting power relations, representational fields are increasingly heterogeneous. In that sense, multiple voices and cultural logics take part in the process of knowledge and worldview constructions. Therefore, our lives are composed of many overlapping and often conflicting stories. These stories are shared in everyday conversations, and disseminated through cultural products (e.g., social media, cinema, television, advertising, music, festivals, museums, books, legislation, and monuments). They simultaneously influence and are influenced by the interplay between historical legacies, economic demands, and national and international politics.

Although interest in identity narratives and social memory has considerably grown over the past decades, they have generally been studied in very fragmented paths. The International Seminar “Narratives and Social Memory: theoretical and methodological approaches” was conceived to address this limitation. It took place in June 2012 at the University of Minho in Braga, Portugal. The seminar gathered about one hundred participants from 22 countries, from all continents.

This volume comprises a selection of papers delivered at the seminar. By bringing together researchers working on these themes from a wide spectrum of disciplines, this international seminar aimed at fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and at instigating sustainable networking. Scholars from disciplines such as Anthropology, Architecture, Communication Sciences, Computer Sciences, Cultural Studies, Education, Geography, History, Linguistics, Literature, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology, participated in a stimulating dialogue.

The seminar’s main goal was to confront different approaches, either currently dominant or emerging theories, in the field of narrative studies and social memory. Among the main topics discussed were the (re)construction or dissolution of ethnic, national and post-colonial identities, migration, colonialism, justice, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, environmental and gender issues.

All chapters provided evidence of the importance of the dialogic understanding between research practices and the necessity of intercultural encounters in the social and human sciences. However, at the same time, they revealed how those practices continue to be challenging.

The chapters address various media of transmission as well as the role of the different kinds of narratives (e.g., audiovisual narratives, digital narratives, autobiographical accounts, journalistic reports, oral speeches, etc.) in shaping social identities and social representations. In addition, throughout the chapters, we can observe a shift of the Eurocentric paradigm in which academic

knowledge is constructed. This suggests that narrative and memory studies constitute central areas whereby it is possible to create new paradigms of intercultural dialogue, and give voice to groups that were silenced in conventional mainstream scientific production. Furthermore, they constitute important tools for reframing the relationship between academic research and society.

Data triangulation is assumed as an important instrument to the development of investigations. In order to structure a critical thinking corpus, many authors have leaned towards multi-method approaches. This is transversal to many papers within this edition, as well as interdisciplinary research. As can be seen throughout this volume, the dialogue established between many areas of knowledge has contributed to the emergence of fresh perspectives and original results.

This edition presents both consolidated and emerging perspectives in narrative and social memory fields and aims at fostering a critical dialogue beyond boundaries set by disciplines, and by geographical and social locations.

It is organized in five sections. The first offers cutting-edge conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of narratives and social memory in the scope of psychological sciences through dialogues with history, cultural anthropology, philosophy, and the political sciences. Those interdisciplinary contributions provide a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and consequences of the social representations of history, underlining their impacts on our daily lives and on international relationships. This section is composed of five chapters addressing different geographical and cultural contexts of research, focusing either on worldwide or cross-cultural context (chapter 1) or data from specific national contexts (Hungary, Chile and Portugal, respectively chapters 3, 4 and 5). Special attention is given to cognitive (chapters 1 and 2), emotional (chapters 3, 4 and 5) dimensions of collective remembering. The chapters cover a wide range of methodological approaches, from in-depth interviews, intensive fieldwork research, content analyses of newspapers and other archival data, and extensive surveys.

The following section encompasses four chapters that approach different forms of mediation, such as (new) journalism and blogging. All texts deal with narrative structures in the media although their focuses are very diverse. The main discipline represented in this section is communication sciences and the geographical framework of all chapters is related to the Portuguese-speaking countries. We can see in this section the shift in communication sciences towards a broader understanding of mediation through analytical perspectives of journalistic coverage (chapters 6, 7 and 9) and through virtual media environment investigation (chapter 8).

Composed of five chapters, the third part focuses on the interplay between audiovisual narratives and cultural memory. All chapters discuss the importance of images, and particularly audiovisual media, on the constitution of our every day representation of the world. Despite their common overall theme, they take different approaches, focusing on fictional films made in Portugal (chapters 10 and 12), an autobiographical documentary (chapter 11), Brazilian end-of-year review television programs (chapter 14) and the historical evolution of audiovisual media productions in Portugal (chapter 13). And they are based on different disciplines: Cultural Studies, Communication Sciences and Geography. In this section most chapters (10, 11, 12 and 13) explore the relationship between the film production and the political and ideological context.

The fourth part brings together four extremely different chapters that are mainly concerned with identity issues from regional, ethnic, national and postnational perspectives. All chapters

include important questions related to the sense of belonging and the formation of collective identities. These chapters address relevant questions regarding the dynamics of auto and hetero-representations, which are examined in the light of Sociology, Literary Studies, Ethnographic investigation, Anthropology and History. The main issues tackled are related to the memory and politics of the construction of a European identity (chapter 15), the creation and spread of a Brazilian regional identity through Literature (chapter 16), the auto-perception of the Russian identity in an immigration context (chapter 17), and the historical process that indigenous identity(ies) entailed in the North American Southwest (chapter 18).

Finally, the last part of this e-book deals with the complex and dynamic interplay between memory, identity and collective action. Several issues are approached taking into account the asymmetrical power relations among different social groups. Once again, the “traditional” narratives of historical events and social representations are contested through interdisciplinary approaches, which propose multi-method analysis of specific matters. On the one hand, these chapters deal with the search for the reconstitution of stories of Portuguese social movements, on the other hand, they explore different forms of narration and representation of marginalized social identities within Portuguese prisons. The themes are as diverse as environmental social movements (chapter 19), the identity of inmates (chapters 20 and 21), and feminine social movements (chapters 22 and 23). Three chapters within this section draw special attention to gender issues (chapters 20, 22 and 23), conducting focus groups, oral history practices, bibliographic and archival research, and the creation of fictional narratives.

This edition was conceived upon the idea that there are many valid approaches to tackle identity narratives, memory, and related issues. Consequently, it embraces and articulates several specific themes, in a web of disciplines and approaches. We believe these different analytical and critical perspectives complement each other and help enlightening the specificities of narrative and memory studies.

The seminar and this edition were only possible due to a committed collective effort. The seminar was organized by the Communication and Society Research Centre, under the scope of the research project “Identity Narratives and Social Memory: the (re)making of lusophony in intercultural contexts” (PTDC/CCI-COM/105100/2008). This project is conducted by a multidisciplinary and international team, joining together different research units. Based at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CSRC, University of Minho, Portugal), it was developed in partnership with the Network Center of Anthropology Research (CRIA, Portugal), the Research Unit in Political Science and International Relations (NICPRI, Portugal) and the Center of African Studies (CEA, Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique).

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We would like to thank all the researchers, who came from different world regions, for the very fruitful discussions. They were made possible because of the excellent quality of the different presentations and pertinent contributions. For us, it was a tremendous but rewarding challenge to organize the international seminar and to assemble this volume. We are grateful to all those who have been involved in the organisation of the event: our colleagues of the Organizing Committee, the members of the Scientific Committee, the university staff and volunteer students. All chapters were submitted to peer review. We are also grateful to all who submitted their papers and to the ad hoc reviewers. We are especially thankful to our contributors for their stimulating participation and for their commitment in the writing process of this volume.